UCCF REPORT

Issued by the
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Indianapolis 7, Indiana

From the Provisional Executive Committee
Of the United Campus Christian Fellowship

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April 1960

" . . . TO EXPRESS GOD'S LOVE IN THE WORLD"

"The mission of the church is to express God's love in the world." This sentence is a key statement in the explanation given in the booklet Proposed Articles of Union as to why there should be a united campus Christian fellowship. In a way, it sounds presumptuous to say that the church lives to express God's love. Yet, there is some interesting history behind this understanding of the church.

Throughout the 19th century, the churches in the Western world greatly expanded their missionary work. In fact, this century was the greatest single period of expansion in missionary activity in the history of the church. The result of the expansion was not quite what one might expect. True, you can read of the rapid growth of the church in some sections of the world. Yet, in other areas, the divisions within and among the churches so confused the work that the witness was severely limited. At the beginning of the 20th century, the churches that had reached out in mission in the 19th century began to discover that the denominations giving them strength at home were causing a weakness in work in the mission field. This discovery raised the whole question of "What is the church, its nature, its mission?"

From the work in missionary areas came another discovery. The church's mission is not simply in the so-called "foreign lands." Her mission is in every land and in every place. The growth of this idea and the rediscovery of the concept of the church as "ecumenical" (i.e., dealing with the whole of the civilized world) was a result of the missionary thrust of the earlier century.

Therefore, at the mid-point of the 20th century, the urgent question facing Christian students has been: What is the nature and mission of the church? United Campus Christian Fellowship is an answer, openly recognized as a partial answer, given by the students of four communions. It is only a beginning, but it is a beginning filled with hope, conviction, and prayer.

In the five years of negotiations toward union of student Christian movements, the mission of the church in the colleges and universities has emerged with clearer focus. In the process we have seen the need for far greater flexibility in patterns of life and work -- perhaps the adoption of a missionary pattern of life. We have become aware of fragmenting influence and the costly consequences of denominationalism. As our eyes became more sensitive, we saw that denominations are not bad in and of themselves -- after all, where and how did we ever come together to realize a United Campus Christian Fellowship? Perhaps we see that, as the pattern of life and work, denominationalism is adequate. We do recognize the great need for a wide variety of campus expressions because of the complexity of relationships in and around a campus, because of the unique history of each college or university, and because of the present expansion of college and university enrollments.

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United Campus Christian Fellowship will come into being when four student movements—Disciples Student Fellowship (International Convention of Christian Churches), Student Fellowship Council (Evangelical United Brethren Church), United Student Fellowship (United Church of Christ), and Westminster Student Fellowship (United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.)—meet for a uniting assembly Aug. 25 - Sept. 1, 1960, at Stephens College, Columbia, Mo.

In light of all the preceding background, WHAT IS UCCF'S RATIONALE? The answer should come in three parts:

1. NATIONALLY

Nationally, those of us who have been working toward union have sought to maintain three basic principles:

a. The mission of the church is to express God's love in the world, and the campus Christian movement is under obligation to engage in this mission.

b. In our union we rejoice that the integrity of persons, movements, and churches has continued. In the midst of differences, we have concluded, and are committed, that union, not federation, is called for in the life of the campus movement today.

c. We also believe that a movement vitally related to the church would not be identical to denominational patterns of the past. Yet, the emerging UCCF has insisted on responsible participation in and of the parent communions.

2. REGIONALLY

At present, the regions seem to be saying, where there is interest and initiative for union, we shall pursue it. In almost every region, some conversation about union has taken place. The hope is that regional movements will come to have a vital and identifiable life beyond that of an occasional conference -- an intercollegiate community concerned with mission and mutual assistance.

3. LOCALLY

UCCF has again insisted that local patterns must be tailored to local needs. Thus, where mission demands and where history will permit, local groups have pursued union. In most cases, this has not included merger of properties and facilities. In almost every case where local UCCF has emerged, there has been a real attempt to create a unity in program and in strategy for the campus. For most local centers, the clarification of mission within the campus has helped to clarify local relationships. Local churches have understood the partnership and teamwork needed in the campus mission. Administration and faculty are increasingly becoming involved in the life of local units; thus the student Christian movement is seeking to become a campus Christian fellowship within college and university communities.

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United Campus Christian Fellowship is a beginning filled with a hope that our oneness in Christ will become a greater reality. It is a beginning that is filled with a conviction that a campus movement must be free to express its life; yet, freedom is also a responsibility in which relationships and faithfulness are an integral part. UCCF is a beginning in which the common prayer is that we shall be led to greater fulfillment of the church's mission.

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